Proposed Bill 800 An Act Restoring Commuter Rail Service from Waterbury to Hartford

Testimony by:

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The Capitol Region Council of Governments opposes proposed bill 800, which calls for removing funding from the New Britain Hartford Busway project for the purpose of restoring commuter rail service from Waterbury to Hartford.

While state funding will cover 20% of the cost of the Busway project, the remaining 80% will be funded by the federal government, and the majority of this funding will come from the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA's) New Starts program. New Starts funding cannot be moved from one project to another at the will of a state or locality. The New Britain Hartford Busway has been through a long and arduous planning process, and at each step it has had to pass muster with the FTA, particularly on measures of cost effectiveness. If the Busway is taken off the table, the federal New Starts funds will not come to our region, but will go to another project in the country that has completed the New Starts process. The proposal for a Waterbury to Hartford rail line has not even begun this planning process. Further, construction of the Busway will not preclude a rail link between the Waterbury line and the New Haven Hartford Springfield line in the future.

The Capitol Region Council of Governments supports a balanced transportation system which provides a variety of ways for people to get around – motor vehicle, transit, bicycle, and on foot. We want to encourage more individuals to use transit, and the way to do that is to provide a high quality transit product that will attract riders out of their cars. The busway is just that.

In 2001 CRCOG adopted a Regional Transit Strategy which recommends the development of several transit improvements including the New Britain Hartford Busway, the New Haven/Hartford/Springfield commuter rail, bus rapid transit improvements in other corridors, and improvements to the basic bus on street system. All these investments work together to create a seamless system that meets the needs of our regions residents and businesses.

The Busway, the first element of our integrated transit plan to proceed to final design, will bring rapid transit to the region. It is a 9.4 mile long traffic free travel way with 11 stations providing frequent and reliable service; off vehicle fare payment and level

platform loading will keep boarding time to a minimum. Busway stations will provide opportunities for transit oriented development. The Busway will carry 16,000 daily riders, approximately 1/3 of whom will be new to transit.

The Busway will not only improve transit service, it was identified in a study completed in 1999 as the most cost effective solution to congestion in the Interstate 84 corridor west of Hartford. More than 50% of all freeway delay in the region takes place on this section of highway. The busway was deemed to be the best solution to the congestion, better than expanding the highway, better than adding HOV lanes, and better than a variety of other transit alternatives. The busway project has withstood the rigorous evaluation process of the Federal Transit Administration and is just months away from securing a full federal funding agreement.

As the busway is proceeding to implementation, the New Haven/Hartford/Springfield commuter and high speed rail project is also moving forward. The Busway and rail projects are complementary, and it is important to recognize that neither can replace the other. The busway will have much more frequent service (every 3 to 6 minutes in the peak) as opposed to the half hourly (in the peak) service on the rail line. In addition, Busway stations will be closer together (every 0.5 to 1 mile) as opposed to the rail line where stations will be spaced 2 or more miles apart. The busway is designed to serve short to medium distance trips. The New Haven Hartford Springfield rail service, and a Waterbury Hartford rail service, for that matter, would serve longer distance intercity trips.

The Capitol Region supports all modes of transit, in the proper location: rail in the New Haven Hartford Springfield corridor, bus rapid transit in our most dense corridors, and bus on street and dial a ride throughout the region. The process for securing federal funding for a transit project is difficult and the Busway is almost to the finish line. Stopping it now will mean going back to the drawing board and it is very likely that we will not see true improvements to our transit system for another generation.

We request that you oppose Bill 800.

New Britain Hartford Busway Fact Sheet

Why a Busway from Hartford to New Britain?

- The busway will relieve congestion on the Interstate 84 corridor west of downtown Hartford.
 This corridor is the most congested in the capital region and more than 50% of the region's
 freeway delay occurs on this segment of highway.
- Frequent, rapid transit: In the peak periods buses will come by stations every 3 to 6 minutes. For
 bus stops off the busway with continuing service on the busway, buses will come by at least every
 15 minutes.
- The busway is expected to generate 4,700 to 6,100 person year jobs.
- The proposed busway will entice drivers to leave their cars at home and use transit aiding freeway congestion and reducing greenhouse gases.
- The busway is a more cost effective solution to congestion than widening the freeway.
- The busway will be funded with 80% federal funds, 20% state funds.

What is the New Britain Hartford Busway?

- The busway is a rapid transit facility: a bus only roadway which will provide frequent and reliable transit service all day long.
- Because the busway is for buses only and buses will not be delayed by other traffic, service is reliable all day long.
- The busway is expected to serve 16,000 daily trips, 5,000 of which are trips that formerly were made by car.
- The busway will have 11 stations along its 9.4 mile length. Stations will have level boarding platforms and off vehicle fare payment.
- A busway can affect land use development patterns and has been proven to be a catalyst for transit oriented development. (Pittsburgh, Ottawa, Brisbane and many other cities) In fact, in Cleveland, the Healthline has resulted in a doubling of property values adjacent to the busway and has stimulated over \$4 billion of investment.
- The busway will be located in an abandoned rail corridor from New Britain to Newington Junction. From Newington Junction to Union Station in downtown Hartford, it will operate in the Amtrak corridor (part of the New Haven Hartford Springfield corridor).
- Because buses will be able to enter the busway at several locations, the busway permits very flexible service. Buses can leave the busway to provide passenger pick ups and drop offs in lower density areas. A busway can deliver passengers from their origin to their destination without the need to transfer to another vehicle or route. The benefits of the busway will extend to many communities and destinations: Waterbury, Bristol, Southington, Cheshire, Central CT State University, West Farms Mall, UConn Health Center, West Hartford Center, St. Francis Hospital, and Hartford Hospital.
- Busways are ideal rapid transit systems for locations like Hartford where densities are too low to warrant an investment in light rail (light rail requires a density of at least 9 dwelling units per acre for the entire corridor). The busway can "gather in" density.
- The busway project includes a 4.5 mile bike path to be built parallel to the busway from New Britain to Newington Junction.
- Busway station design has paid careful attention to the need for pedestrian and bicycle access to the stations.

New Britain Hartford Busway Fact Sheet

Busway Cost and Funding:

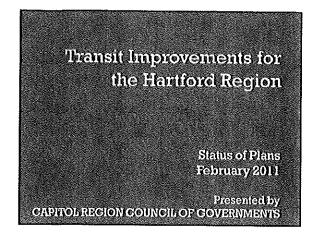
- According to the latest cost estimates, the busway project will be \$567 million. This covers the cost to construct the busway, the bike path, and the stations, the cost to purchase the buses and the needed right of way, the cost to reconstruct bridges and overpasses, and a contingency set aside.
- The state is very close to getting approval from the FTA for a full funding grant agreement, which will provide for funding of 80% of the project by the federal government.
- The busway will be funded with 80% federal funds, 20% state funds. This equates to \$454 million coming from the federal government for the project. \$275 million of the federal funds are funds that are only available for this project. The remaining federal funds have been set aside for the project out of annual federal appropriations (\$85 million from transit appropriations, \$93.6 million from highway funding sources). The state funding (\$113 million) has already been committed to the project in prior years' budgets and the current state transit capital plan.

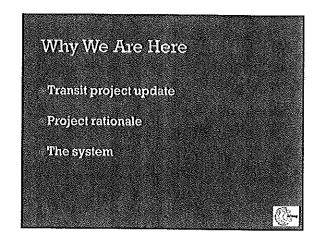
Background - How the Project was Developed:

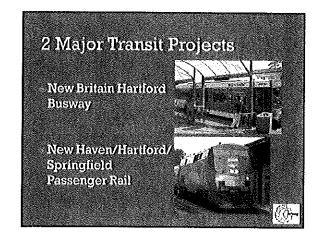
- Planning for the project began in the Hartford West Major Investment Study (MIS) which
 evaluated alternatives for relieving congestion on Interstate 84 west of Hartford (March 1999).
 This corridor is the most congested in the capitol region. In fact, more than 50% of the region's
 traffic delay occurs on this segment of highway.
- The Hartford West MIS identified the busway as the most cost effective way to reduce congestion. The final plan also included recommendations for some small highway improvements, which have been making their way forward to construction. The Hartford West MIS examined several alternative transit proposals, including light rail, commuter rail, and busway, in several alignments. It also evaluated high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes. The New Britain Hartford Busway was the most effective (attracted more riders) transit alternative tested.
- The ridership projections were made with a computer model that is approved by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for projecting transit ridership. The ridership estimates have been exhaustively reviewed by the FTA on an annual basis.
- Upon completion of the MIS in 1999, the Capitol Region Council of Governments and the Central CT Regional Planning Agency designated the busway as the locally preferred alternative (LPA) for the corridor. This was the first step in moving the project forward for federal transit funding.
- Since 1999, the project has been moving forward through the FTA process for new starts funding.
 This included completion of an Environmental Impact Study and development of design
 documents. Each year the DOT has submitted a New Starts application to the FTA which has
 enabled the project to move forward in the funding process.
- The Capitol Region Council of Governments used Transportation Strategy Board funding to help busway corridor towns to develop plans for transit oriented development at station sites.

Construction Schedule:

• Construction is expected to begin in early 2011, with the busway fully operational in 2014.

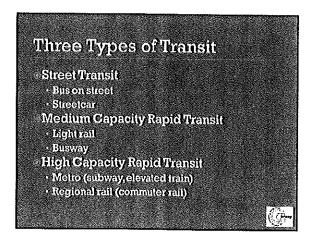


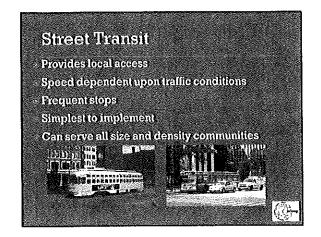


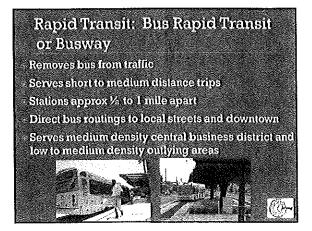


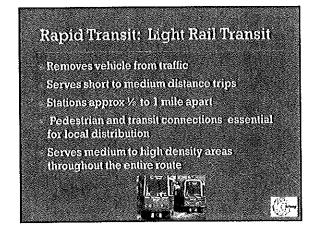


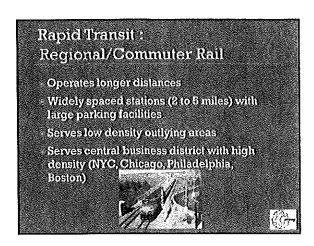


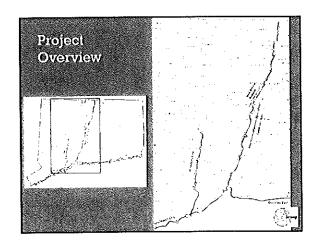


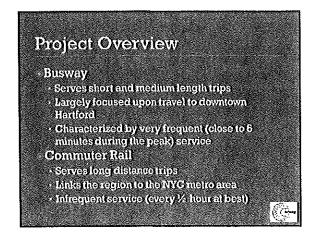


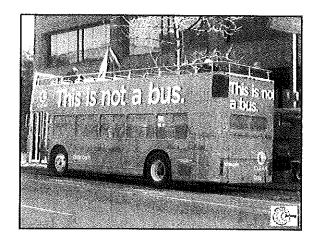


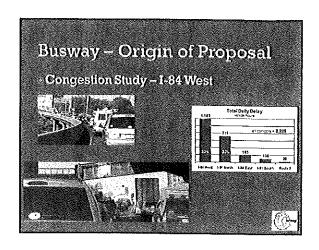








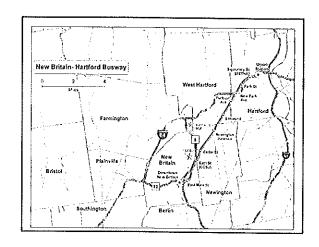




Busway - Origin of Proposal

Many options considered:

More freeway lanes
Other roadway improvements
Transit improvements
various alignments
bus, light rail, regional rail
Busway proved most cost effective



Busway Design
Built in rail corridor
Bus only roadway

9.4 miles long
11 stations
Bike path

